



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

*House of Commons Debates*

---

VOLUME 148 | NUMBER 020 | 1st SESSION | 42nd PARLIAMENT

---

**OFFICIAL REPORT (HANSARD)**

**Thursday, February 18, 2016**

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

---

Opposition Motion—Israel

**Ms. Dianne Watts (South Surrey—White Rock, CPC):**

Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time today with the hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan.

I stand in this House today and give my support to the motion that was put forward by my colleague from Parry Sound—Muskoka.

Canada and Israel have enjoyed a long-standing relationship and years of economic and diplomatic relations, including the recently expanded free trade agreement between our countries.

As a former mayor of the City of Surrey, I led two successful trade delegations to Israel, and I have spent time on the West Bank. These missions sought to bolster the relationship and the understanding between our two countries. I was proud to be a delegate from Canada advocating for increased ties between our two countries.

It is also because of my experience with these trade delegations that I stand before the House today and frankly state that the international boycott, divestment, and sanctions movement is actually a vehicle for spreading anti-Semitism and for advocating for the elimination of the Jewish state. Supporting this movement is unacceptable and unsupportable.

My colleagues in this House must recognize and affirm the State of Israel's right to exist and defend itself. Many of my colleagues have stood here this morning and made those statements. I applaud them and thank them for taking that stand. We must rally behind one of our closest allies, do what we can to ensure its success, and not support its demise.

Let me outline what the BDS movement means for Israel, because it is vitally important to understand what is at issue here.

By targeting businesses, universities, and civil society institutions, BDS tries to bring the conflict of the Middle East to Canada. Canadian organizations should never be used as a vehicle for social exclusion or the demonization of Canadians based on their national origin. That is exactly what the BDS movement is doing to Canadians and Israelis.

This goes even further. The BDS movement actually undermines peace. It does nothing to bring the two sides of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict together or to improve the quality of life for Palestinian citizens. In fact, it does quite the opposite. It jeopardizes the livelihood of thousands of Palestinians employed by Israeli companies.

There are many examples of this already: companies and factories that have moved from the West Bank, and Palestinians who have lost their livelihood. This does not promote peace, this does not better the lives of Palestinians or Israelis, and this does not help Canadians at home, because there is important work going on in Israel, in the West Bank, by all members of society.

When I was in Israel and met with a group of Palestinian business people, the message was very clear. They wanted trade and they wanted to encourage companies to locate on the West Bank. Meanwhile, the BDS movement does nothing to promote trade or create jobs for the Palestinian people. In fact, it does quite the opposite.

This boycott manifests itself in many ways, from pressuring consumers not to buy Israeli products to calling for universities to cut ties with Israeli academia and researchers, and even calls to ban Israeli athletes from international sporting competitions.

Let me give a few examples of the important work that the BDS movement is actively trying to cripple.

In the city of Surrey we have Simon Fraser University, which has ties to the Ben-Gurion University of the Negev in Israel. We also have a number of research initiatives under way. I am going to highlight two of the main initiatives, to demonstrate the impact of not having the co-operation between Canada and our counterparts in Israel.

Many of you have probably heard Captain Trevor Greene's story. He was a Canadian soldier who was with the Armed Forces in Afghanistan. He was sitting one evening with a group of elders, and out of respect, he took his helmet off and put it on the ground, and he was struck in the back of the head with an axe. His story is really a remarkable one because, while he did survive, he and his family were told that he would never walk again and that he would live his remaining days lying in a bed, unresponsive.

A young neuroscientist, Dr. Ryan D'Arcy, put together a team to work with Captain Greene, and over a number of years they worked to rewire his brain. They worked together. With Dr. D'Arcy, who was one of the individuals who accompanied me on both trade missions to Israel, we partnered with an Israeli company called ReWalk, which produces exoskeletons. Through that work, we had a team come to Canada and fit Trevor with an exoskeleton. I am really proud to say that, about six months ago, he was able to walk in the exoskeleton and get his life back.

This life-changing research continues, and it has changed the course of spinal cord research. Without this important initiative and innovative work being done in Israel today, Captain Greene's story would not be possible.

Briefly, I would say that, in the project we are doing right now between the universities, doctors in Surrey and the Ben-Gurion research team in Israel have been putting together leading researchers who are studying the correlation between diabetes and Alzheimer's, two diseases

that affect too many Canadians. This is important work that will change the course of how we deal with populations that have high rates of diabetes. One such is the South Asian population. This important research will also help us better understand Alzheimer's and take us one step closer to battling a disease that affects so many people around the world. We have heard much in recent years about the expected increase of both of those diseases. With partnerships between the universities and the research, we are helping combat these epidemics—again another game changer.

These are but a few examples of the work that is going on and the innovation and technology breakthroughs between the strong partnerships of our two nations. Keeping this groundbreaking research in mind, can members imagine, if the BDS movement were successful and we actually cut ties, how many people would be impacted not only in Canada but around the world?

The basis on which BDS is found with groups pushing an anti-Semitic agenda is unacceptable, and it goes against everything that we as Canadians stand for. Let me be clear. This motion is not against free speech or free ideas. This motion simply condemns the actions that have had huge detrimental impacts, both here at home and abroad, and that are totally unacceptable.

**Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP):**

Mr. Speaker, for some time now, we have been concerned about the extremely unfortunate rise in acts of anti-Semitism in Hungary in particular. This is nothing new. However, the previous Conservative government put Hungary on the safe country list.

Could my colleague explain the Conservative position on this?

**Ms. Dianne Watts:**

Mr. Speaker, I would say that any time there are groups of people who have ideals in anti-Semitic actions they are to be condemned. It is unacceptable. It is not part of who we are as people, as in any country around the world, and it is wrong. It has been wrong, it will be wrong, and will continue to be wrong.

**Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.):**

Mr. Speaker, I would ask the hon. member to perhaps explain what signal we are sending to Canadians by adopting the motion that has been put forward.

**Ms. Dianne Watts:**

Mr. Speaker, the message that we are sending is that we are taking a leadership role. We have heard not only from the Conservatives, but from the Liberal side of the House as well, that we are in support of the tenets that make us Canadian. When we look at individuals who have basically stated that they have no right to exist, that is absolutely unacceptable. We are all human beings. We all occupy this world. We need to come together and support one another. That is exactly what we would be doing through this motion.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC):**

Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the member on an excellent speech. I particularly liked how she talked about, specifically, the benefits for her riding.

We support Israel as a matter of principle, of course, but there are also many benefits to our country, through trade, through integration of academic institutions, and others.

I wonder if the member would speak a bit more, specifically, about the benefits to her riding, and also the benefits to Canada in general, of a strong relationship between Canada and Israel.

**Ms. Dianne Watts:**

Mr. Speaker, we have had a very robust relationship with Israel. In terms of the trade delegations that I headed up as the former mayor and also as the CEO of the Health Tech Innovation Foundation, that technology has helped on many fronts, many people in Canada, right across this country. The innovation that has come from Israel and highlighting the exoskeleton from ReWalk is an absolute game-changer for people with spinal cord injury. That is a sample.

We have ongoing relationships with Israel. We have the technology that we have imported and that we are using in our health authorities.

I would say that we continue to strengthen, we continue to work, and we continue to support our friends in Israel.